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Vidkun Quisling and the Deportation of Norway's Jews

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NS-styret var godt informert og deltok med åpne øyne i deportasjonen og den økonomiske likvidasjonen av jødene i Norge.

—Bjarte Bruland, *Aftenposten*, April 12, 2004

(The NS government was well informed and took part in the deportation and economic liquidation of the Jews in Norway with open eyes.)

Vidkun Quisling, the former head of the collaborationist government during the German occupation of Norway, stood trial for *landssvik* (treason) in the Fall of 1945. During the proceedings, he frequently resorted to evasion, attempting whenever possible to avoid responsibility for his past actions. However, he did not equivocate on one point. When asked by the prosecuting attorney if he had, in his speeches, expressed the viewpoint “at jødene er skyld i en rekke av de ulykker som rammer verden?” [that the Jews are guilty of a number of the misfortunes that have stricken the world?], Quisling replied: “Ja, det er min absolute overbevisning” (*Straffesak mot Vidkun Abraham Lauritz Jonsson Quisling* 1946, 130) [Yes, that is my absolute conviction]. Even at a time when he had every reason to fear execution, he did not deny being an anti-Semite.

For most of his life, however, anti-Semitism had not been part of Quisling's ideological outlook.¹ He only assumed this point of view in

1. This article is not biographical. Its focus is directed toward Quisling's connection with what has come to be called the Norwegian Shoah, and it therefore is largely

the middle of his political career. What influenced Quisling the most was his strong desire to come to power. Having always attained the highest grades possible during his schooling, from grammar school through graduation from the Military Academy, all the while treated by members of his family as someone who was privileged and special, he had come to regard himself as exceptional. He convinced himself that his superior intellect set him apart, and that he was destined to become Norway's leader. His messianic belief in his mission caused him to search for the means that would enable him to rise to political prominence.

For a time during the 1920s, influenced by the Communist triumph in Russia, he concluded that socialism appeared to be the key to the future, and he briefly attempted, unsuccessfully, to establish ties with both the Norwegian Labor Party and the Norwegian Communist Party.² But later when he entered politics full-time in 1930 as a supporter of Bondepartiet (the Agrarian Party), he took the stance of being an ultranationalist who was passionately anti-socialist. After his break with the Agrarians due to their refusal to accept him as their party foreman,³ he chose to become the head of a new party, Nasjonal Samling (National Union; commonly referred to by its initials, NS), founded in 1933. Initially it was an extreme nationalist organization, emphasizing in particular the need for national unity against the alleged divisive influence of Arbeiderpartiet (the Labor Party), whose imported Marxist ideology, Quisling maintained, was a revolutionary threat to Norwegian society.

In spite of his condemnation of Norwegian socialists for adhering to a foreign doctrine, he too continued to receive inspiration from

restricted to relevant information that shows how his political career progressed. Originally an extreme nationalist and anti-communist, his ideological outlook later evolved to also include strong anti-Semitism, leading directly to the discriminatory policy that he followed against Norway's Jews during the occupation. The inclusion of a limited amount of background material about Quisling's early life, as well as brief mention about the failure of anti-Semitism in postwar Norway, are intended to allow readers to gain overall perspective about Quisling and Norway without having to resort to use of outside reference works. More detailed source material is referred to in the article's subsequent footnotes for those who may wish to obtain fuller understanding of topics related to Quisling.

2. The record of his postwar trial contains detailed testimony of how he sought contact with leading members of the labor movement, and reveals also Quisling's attempt to downplay the seriousness of his intentions (*Straffesak mot Vidkun Abraham Lauritz Jonsson Quisling* 1946, 150–4).

3. Quisling served as Minister of Defense in the Agrarian governments that held office from May 1931 to March 1933.

external influences. In the early 1930s, before and after Nasjonal Samling's start, he initially looked primarily toward Fascist Italy, adopting Mussolini's corporate economic model as part of NS's program. It was not until after NS failed dismally in the national election of 1933 (it did not elect a single parliamentary representative), and had only limited, scattered success in the local elections of 1934, that Quisling, inspired by the dramatic Nazi takeover in Germany, began to emulate Hitler, including the latter's use of anti-Semitism as the core of his racist ideology. For Quisling, the adoption of anti-Semitism, although initially clearly motivated by opportunism, was not a radical departure. It served naturally as an extension of his racial worldview, already formulated, in which he stressed alleged Norwegian racial superiority: Norwegians during the Viking period, he maintained, had been part of the predominant Nordic race, which he now described as being in the process of reasserting itself, with Norway destined to play a major role in world affairs (Høidal 2002, 155). Once anti-Semitism became part of his racial perspective, Quisling added the obvious corollary that there were inferior races, first and foremost the Jews, who (in accord with Nazi belief) threatened the purity of the Nordic race through sexual defilement (Bruknapp 1976, 24). Anti-Semitism was also combined with Quisling's previous strong condemnation of the socialist Labor Party, which he now portrayed as being part of the worldwide revolutionary Marxist conspiracy that was organized and led by the Jews.

Although it numbered less than 2,000 in the mid-1930s, and did not include persons who were prominent politically,⁴ economically, or socially, he insisted that Norway's small Jewish community purportedly was part of this threat, scheming to have Norway incorporated into a Marxist world state led by the Jews (Bruknapp 1976, 22–3). When the Labor government in 1935 granted Lev Trotsky asylum in Norway, Quisling condemned this decision bitterly, not merely because of Trotsky's international reputation as a leading Communist revolutionary but also because he was a Jew. Shortly after Trotsky's arrival in June, Quisling, as the main speaker at an NS protest rally, decried "revolutionsagenten Bronstein-Trotsky's innsmugling til Norge" (Høidal 2009, 46) [the smuggling of the revolutionary agent Bronstein-Trotsky into

4. Although NS would frequently refer to the parliamentary leader of the Conservatives, Carl J. Hambro, as "jøden Hambro" [the Jew Hambro], his family had converted to Christianity already in the early 1800s.

Norway]. Quisling's invective was directed as much against Trotsky's Jewish heritage as it was against his revolutionary notoriety.

Contrary to what he had hoped, Quisling's attempt to imitate Hitler (all the while insisting that his party was uniquely Norwegian in character) did not achieve its intent. Nasjonal Samling did worse in the national election of 1936 than it had three years previously when as a newly established party, it had a more unclear profile. Due to its controversial standpoints, of which anti-Semitism was but one of several, by 1936 Quisling's NS was no longer regarded as a *borgerlig* (bourgeois) party, having instead become an extremist group with which no other party cooperated. Among the causes for its loss of voter support was opposition from Lutheran pietists, in particular on *Vestlandet* (the West Coast) and in Northern Norway. Having earlier provided Quisling with some backing due to his professed defense of Christian values, they now rejected NS, in large part because of its anti-Semitism (Høidal 2002, 168–71, 183).

Soon after the election, the party imploded, with the majority of its talented members refusing to accept Quisling's incompetent leadership. He dogmatically clung to his position as party leader, however, rejecting all suggestions for change. His critics in turn either resigned or were expelled from the party. In the years before the German invasion, NS was consequently reduced to a small political sect consisting of a few hundred active true believers who accepted Quisling uncritically.⁵ During this period his anti-Semitism became even more virulent. Although he originally adopted it because of Hitler's success, his abhorrence of Jews quickly became an ingrained emotional part of his character. In 1938 and 1939 he presented a series of anti-Semitic lectures at which petitions were drawn up in protest against Jewish refugees from Germany being admitted to the country. He also advocated the reinstatement of the constitutional clause that barred Jews from Norway, which had been abrogated in 1851. His fanaticism made him even more controversial than before, to the extent that many Norwegians were automatically repelled by him (Beinset 1938; Høidal 2002, 233–5). On the other hand, those party members who remained loyal were generally as anti-Semitic as he was. It should furthermore be kept in mind that even before the German occupation, NS was not an ordinary political party. It was based on the *førerprinsipp* (leader

5. For thorough coverage of the divisions within NS that reduced Quisling's party to a small sect, see Brevig (2002, 76–102) and Høidal (1975, 467–93).

principle; German, *Führerprinzip*) under which the head of the party, the *Fører* (leader), had absolute authority, and his orders were to be obeyed without question. Once he had expelled the dissidents who openly disagreed with him in 1936–1937, Quisling's position as party leader did not face any serious challenges from within NS for the remainder of its existence.

* * *

Due to his minuscule following within Norway, however, Quisling after 1936 had no hope of coming to power except through foreign backing, and the obvious source was Germany. Although he initially encountered difficulty, he eventually succeeded in gaining contact with key officials within the Nazi Party and the German Navy. These persons, in part because of their ideological affinity with Quisling and partly because they felt they could use him for their own interests, secured him access to Hitler in December 1939.⁶

Quisling was introduced to Hitler not only as the founder of a “nasjonalt og sosialist parti” [national and socialist party] based on “et antisemitisk standpunkt” [an anti-Semitic viewpoint] that allegedly had strong support within Norway, but also as a former Minister of Defense and General Staff officer who had close ties with the officer corps, and who was willing to engage in “det intimeste samarbeid med Tyskland” [the most intimate cooperation with Germany].⁷ Hitler, who had no direct knowledge of Norwegian politics, gained a positive impression of Quisling, not the least because the latter's ideology was clearly imitative of National Socialism.

Hitler provided Quisling with invaluable support following the German invasion of Norway in April 1940 and subsequently.⁸ It must

6. The most prominent of these were Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, the commander of the German Navy, and Alfred Rosenberg, a leading Nazi party racial theorist and head of the party's Aussenpolitisches Amt (Office of Foreign Affairs). See Looock (1970) and Høidal (2002) for analysis of Raeder's and Rosenberg's involvement with Quisling and their influence on the German invasion and occupation of Norway.

7. Rosenberg's addendum in his letter to Raeder of December 13, 1939, in which Rosenberg described the information that he had provided about Quisling to Hitler. This document was used by the prosecution in Quisling's treason trial (*Straffesak mot Vidkun Abraham Lauritz Jonsson Quisling* 1946, 39).

8. Hitler felt a debt of gratitude to Quisling because he had warned the Führer of the danger of a British invasion of Norway. Although Quisling had no direct evidence of this, and presented his argument as a means to obtain German backing, the British and French during the Spring of 1940 had planned to land troops in Norway, which the Germans later discovered.

be stressed that without Hitler's backing Quisling could not have survived politically for a moment during the occupation. Josef Terboven, whom Hitler appointed as *Reichskommissar* (Reich Commissioner), the highest German official in Norway, considered Quisling to be a liability and, in the summer of 1940, sought unsuccessfully to oust him as head of NS—the only party that the Germans permitted to exist.⁹

Nazi officials led by Terboven always held final authority during the occupation, but the Germans sought to maintain the illusion that Norwegians were in charge of administration. Under the *Kommissariske Statsråd* (Commissarial Council), established in September 1940, NS members controlled ten of thirteen government offices. Although Quisling was not included, he exerted his influence because he met regularly with the NS ministers on the Council. Anti-Jewish measures could therefore be enacted and enforced with no opposition. Some Jewish physicians and attorneys were not allowed to practice their professions; attempts were made to prevent marriages between non-Jews and Jews; and from January 1942 Jews were required to have the letter "J" stamped on their identity cards (Mendelsohn 1986, 47–8, 50). Although the Germans initiated the directive that Jewish identity cards be clearly recognizable, this decree was executed by Norwegian police officials, as was also the accompanying requirement made by the *NS Statistiske kontor* (NS Statistics Office) that obliged all Jews to fill out a "Spørreskjema for jøder i Norge" [Questionnaire for Jews in Norway]. While the marking of identity cards and the registration of Jews did not at the time arouse a great deal of attention within Norwegian society except with those who were directly affected, it was, as Bjarte Bruland has emphasized, the major starting point for the later extermination of Norwegian Jews (Bruland 2008, 13).

The NS-controlled Justice Department had already, in the Fall of 1941, begun to collect information about the economic resources of the Jews with a compilation of Jewish property, while a register of Jewish-owned enterprises was similarly gathered by the Police Department (Johansen 2011, 10–1; Fosnes 2006, 4). Nasjonal Samling's police officials in collaboration with the Gestapo were also responsible for

9. For detailed accounts of the intrigues involving Quisling and his detractors as well as his supporters, both German and Norwegian, during the fluid period that extended from the beginning of the occupation to the time when NS became the sole party allowed to hold office, see Looek (1970, 271–546), Høidal (2002, 281–352), and Dahl (1992, 74–158).

drawing up name lists of Jews in more and more detail (Johansen 2011, 12–3; Fosnes 2006, 4)—lists that were later used for deportation.

Nasjonal Samling's propaganda, to which Quisling contributed significantly, conformed fully to the Nazi portrayal of the Jews. At an anti-Semitic congress in Frankfurt am Main in March 1941, sponsored by one of his most important German patrons, the Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg, Quisling gave a speech in which he proposed that a joint European law be established to provide a solution to "jødespørsmålet" [the Jewish question]. His appearance at the congress received considerable coverage in Norway ("Nasjonal Samlings Fører reiser kravet" 1941). In countless speeches, he remained true to his vision of himself as an international statesman and philosopher who interpreted the unfolding of world history to lesser mortals. Following Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, Quisling no longer was restricted by consideration of the Nazi-Soviet nonaggression pact of 1939, and could once more give voice to his fervent anti-communism, which he combined with anti-Semitism. In a major speech to NS members in September 1941, he posed the question of whether the evil forces in the war would succeed in destroying the Germanic peoples and their Nordic principles, creating a Jewish "verdensherredømme" [world order] in the form of a global Soviet Republic and a new League of Nations. Or would the new Germany succeed in protecting Nordic principles by winning the war, thereby forming a new order that would lift human development to a higher level ("Av Quislings tale på Colosseum foregående dag" 1941).

On February 1, 1942, again because of Hitler's goodwill, Quisling at last reached what he believed was the pinnacle of his career as the formal leader of Norway's government. He was appointed head of an all-NS administration, the so-called "nasjonale regjering" [National Government] with the title of Minister President.¹⁰ Among his first actions was the reinstatement of "jødeparagrafen" [the Jewish paragraph], the clause in the constitution that prohibited Jews from immigrating to Norway. Although it did not immediately affect persons already in Norway, it nevertheless served as an indication of the Quisling government's intention to deal harshly with the country's Jewish residents (Bruland 2008, 42).

More severe measures followed. In the Summer of 1942, the German Security Police in Oslo received instructions from headquarters in

10. German motives for Quisling's designation as Minister President are covered in Dahl (1992, 241–55) and Høidal (2002, 404–13).

Berlin that the “Jewish question” in Norway should “undersøkes og løses overensstemmende med den norske regjeringens ønske” (Wagner 1945, 203) [be investigated and solved in accordance with the wish of the Norwegian government]. Close cooperation took place between the German police and Karl Marthinsen, the NS head of *Statspolitiet* (the State Police)¹¹ during the following months. As an indication of pending major actions, anti-Jewish propaganda increased significantly in the press during the Fall of 1942 (Fosnes 2006, 5–6; Wagner 1945, 204).

While primary responsibility for the arrest and deportation of the Jews rested with the Germans, as elsewhere in Europe, there is no question that Quisling not only approved of these efforts but actively supported their implementation. And while the evidence is not entirely clear, it appears that he actually went so far as to favor a speedy expulsion of the Jews. Wilhelm Constantin Wagner, the SS official in charge of dealing with “alle spørsmål som angikk kirke, frimurere og jøder” [all questions concerning religion, Freemasons, and Jews] while serving in the Security Police in Oslo, testified at Quisling’s trial that the general impression among the Germans was that Quisling preferred quick action. Wagner did not consider this surprising because, as he put it, the Germans regarded Quisling as a fellow National Socialist “som hadde den samme anskuelse i disse spørsmål som tyske nasjonalsosialister” (Wagner 1945, 204) [who had the same opinion about these questions as German National Socialists]. Wagner’s assertion is supported by Quisling’s failure to slow down or thwart the deportations in any way.

Instead he contributed personally by signing a number of discriminatory laws to assist in the arrest of the Jews, a gradual process that had begun previously. In Northern Norway, male Jews were incarcerated already during the Spring and early Summer of 1941, the majority at the time of the German attack against the Soviet Union in June. In the region of Trøndelag, whose major city, Trondheim, included the country’s second-largest concentration of Jews,¹² imprisonment of male Jews occurred in early October 1942 after Terboven had declared a local state of emergency. This was followed by the arrest of male Jews from throughout the entire country on October 26. Finally, on the night of November 25–26, the police were ordered to arrest all Jews (Bruland 2008, 14, 17–8).

11. *Statspolitiet* was the Norwegian equivalent of the Gestapo.

12. The largest cluster of Jews resided in Oslo and its immediate vicinity, approximately 55 percent. The remainder, however, were spread over all of Norway.

Quisling was directly involved in abetting the arrests by signing a number of measures that affected the Jews. Two days before the countrywide jailing of male Jews, he approved a law, co-signed by the Minister of Justice and the NS General Secretary, that made possible the mass arrest of Jews, and which also required female family members to report daily to the police (Mendelsohn 1986, 84–5). On October 26, simultaneously with the arrest of male Jews, Quisling signed a decree for the expropriation of all Jewish economic assets. This meant that the destruction of the means of livelihood for Norway's Jewish population was at hand, indicating that total arrest if not deportation would soon follow. The takeover of Jewish property was duly carried out by the Interior Department under Albert Viljam Hagelin. There was, however, a division of the spoils. Whereas the NS administration assumed control of residences and businesses, a special agreement was made with the Germans that gave them possession of the jewelry, watches, and precious metals that were taken from the Jews (Bruland 2008, 44). And finally, on November 17, Quisling approved the requirement that all Jews (not already arrested) be registered within two weeks (Mendelsohn 1986, 96–7).

The increasingly severe treatment of the Jews created attention and aroused concern within society. On November 10, prior to the first deportation, “Den Midlertidige Kirkeledelse” [the Temporary Church Leadership], representing the state Lutheran Church, which had previously broken with Quisling's administration, plus six independent Christian denominations and the two theological faculties sent him a letter protesting the treatment of the Jews. It was read from pulpits throughout Norway on subsequent Sundays (Mendelsohn 1991, 18). He was admonished to “stans jødeforfølgelsen og stopp det rasehat som gjennom pressen spredtes i vårt land” [halt the persecution of the Jews and stop the racial hatred that the press is spreading in our land].¹³ The Church's protest received widespread international notice as well. It was published in the Swedish press, referred to by the Swedish clergy in their sermons, and read over London Radio. Quisling did not respond (Mendelsohn 1986, 103–4).

Although there had been growing indications during the Fall of 1942 that severe actions were pending against all Jews in Norway, the mass arrests that encompassed the entire country were triggered by an unanticipated incident. On October 22 a *grensepolitimann* (border

13. The letter is quoted in its entirety in Mendelsohn (1986, 102–3).

policeman), Arne Hvam, was shot by a member of the resistance, a *grenseløs* (border guide) who was escorting a group of Jews on a train from Oslo to Halden, located close to the Swedish border. Hvam's death immediately resulted in a massive anti-Semitic media campaign in which the Jews were held responsible for the killing. As an indication of the importance attached to this episode, Hvam's burial was attended by a large number of German and NS dignitaries, headed by Terboven, Quisling, and Wilhelm Rediess, the highest German police official in Norway, thereby publicly symbolizing close collaboration between Quisling's administration and German authorities in taking action against the Jews (Emberland and Kott 2012, 356–7).

The arrests of male Jews, in conjunction with constant references to Hvam's fate, occurred just 4 days later, indicating how hurriedly they were carried out. Documentary evidence from sources in Stettin¹⁴ similarly reveals that the immediate decision to carry out mass arrests originated in Norway, not in Germany (Bruland 2008, 20). The incarceration of male Jews took place in an atmosphere of improvisation. The action was coordinated between the German police and Karl Marthinsen of the State Police (Emberland and Kott 2012, 358). The Germans were careful, however, to have the actual arrests organized and carried out by Norwegians, based on the accurate assumption that this would cause less protest within the population than if the arrests were executed by German police (Johansen 2011, 17). In the Oslo area, these were conducted mainly by units whose members were part of NS—the State Police, *Germaniske SS Norge* (Germanic SS Norway), and the *Hird*, Quisling's brown-shirted equivalent of the German SA (Bruland 2008, 19). Throughout the rest of the country, however, the arrests were made by regular police and sheriffs. All acted on Marthinsen's orders to round up Jewish males 15 years of age or older. Hird members, including some who had been in Waffen SS units, also served as guards at a number of internment camps where Jewish males were housed (*Straffesak mot Vidkun Abraham Lauritz Jonsson Quisling* 1946, 160). In the southern part of the country, the majority of those arrested were sent to Berg, located outside of Tønsberg, which stood out as the only camp whose staff and guards were entirely made up of Norwegians (Hetland 2012, 28).¹⁵

14. Stettin was the German port to which the great majority of Norwegian Jews were initially shipped.

15. Several of the administrators and guards at Berg were found guilty after the war of having mistreated prisoners.

Exactly one month after the arrest of the male Jews came the turn of Jewish women and children to be arrested, but not for internment. They were scheduled for immediate deportation, along with the men. Once more the roundup was characterized by haste and improvisation. The rapid move to attempt the forced expulsion of all Jews from Norway occurred at this time because German police authorities had suddenly received an offer from the Navy that briefly freed up ships to carry out the deportation. Shipping availability was scarce due to the high demand for transport ships to and from Norway to meet wartime military requirements. The German police therefore acted quickly to take advantage of the offer (Mendelsohn 1986, 110–1). On November 24, SS Hauptsturmführer Wagner, the police official responsible for matters involving Jews in Norway, informed Karl Marthinsen that all persons who had the letter J stamped in their identity papers, along with their families, were to be “evakuert” [evacuated] two days later from Oslo. Although Marthinsen later complained about the short time frame he had been given, with the State Police forced to work around the clock to implement planning, the operation was executed on schedule, with Marthinsen again supplementing the police with NS members from the Hird and Germanic SS in the Oslo area (Emberland and Kott 2012, 361). In the rest of the country, as before, regular police and sheriffs carried out this assignment, with orders emanating from Marthinsen.

Thanks to thorough State Police planning, the Jews were brought to the pier in Oslo harbor where the troop transport ship *Donau* waited to take them on board. In the capital, a fleet of taxis was employed to shuttle the arrestees continuously to their destination. “NS hadde . . . hand om jødane heilt fram til kaia, der dei var overtekne av tysk SS” (Hetland 2012, 28) [NS had . . . control of the Jews all the way to the pier, where they were delivered to the German SS]. The *Donau* departed already in mid-afternoon on November 26 with its load of 532 prisoners, the largest single transport of Jews from Norway during the occupation. Not all of those who had been arrested, however, reached Oslo in time to be dispatched on board the *Donau*. A second group, numbering 158, who came from parts of the country at a distance from southeastern Norway, therefore remained imprisoned until February 25, 1943, when they were transported to Germany on board the freighter *Gotenland*. In addition, Jews in smaller numbers were also shipped from Norway both before and after these two major transports. A total of 772 were deported in this manner (Bruland 2008, 18).

Upon arrival in Stettin, the captives were sent directly by train in cattle cars to Auschwitz in Poland. At the death camp, the great majority of women, plus children and old men, were immediately gassed. Able-bodied men and some women were exploited as slave laborers (Mendelsohn 1986, 128–31, 147–51). Only thirty-four of those deported were alive at the end of the war (Emberland and Kott 2012, 362). Two of them testified at Quisling's treason trial.¹⁶ None of the survivors were women.

The conduct of Quisling's administration stands in stark contrast with Denmark's experience as the other Scandinavian state that experienced Nazi occupation during World War II. Although the Danish government cooperated with the Germans concerning other matters, it steadfastly insisted that the country's Jewish residents not be harmed. This delayed the effort to deport the Jews by almost a year compared with Norway. Furthermore, although the regular government resigned in August 1943, an event that was followed shortly afterward by the German arrest order, Danish civil servants who retained their positions within the administration remained committed to saving the Jews. They not only opposed the largely unsuccessful attempt to ensnare the Jews, but worked incessantly on their own and through the Red Cross to make certain that the small number that was captured received adequate care. The result was that of the 472 Jews who were deported from Denmark, only a minority of fifty-two died while in German captivity (Bak 2009, 4), most from natural causes.

In Norway neither Quisling nor members of his government, with one exception,¹⁷ made any effort to delay or mitigate persecution of the Jews. Quisling also did not show any interest in the Jews' fate once they had been shipped off for extermination. On the contrary, they were stripped of their Norwegian citizenship (Mendelsohn 1986, 113–4). As a result, they were without protection, at the mercy of the Nazi policy of annihilation.

In a letter to Quisling dated October 6, 1942, prior to the arrests, one of his longtime NS associates, Halldis Neegaard Østbye, recommended a course of action that paralleled to a considerable extent what the Jews

16. Leo Eitinger and Asriel B. Hirsch. At the time of the trial, they were, respectively, 33 and 25 years old (see *Straffesak mot Vidkun Abraham Lauritz Jonsson Quisling* 1946, 157–61).

17. Kjeld Stub Irgens, the head of *Sjøfartsdepartementet* (the Shipping Department), tipped off members of the resistance movement about pending actions against the Jews (see Mendelsohn 1986, 329).

would soon experience. She urged that they be arrested in stages, sent to concentration camps without public notice, and executed in the same manner as one kills animals—quickly and painlessly, not by slow torment. “Det bør også gjelde jødene” (quoted in Mendelsohn 1986, 80) [The same ought also to be true for the Jews]. But while Quisling was aware of what the Jews could expect following their expulsion, after the war he consistently denied any responsibility for the deportation of the Jews. During his treason trial he testified that he had no knowledge of their transport to Germany until after their departure, when he was informed by Marthinsen. Quisling blamed the arrests on the State Police chief and his superior, Minister of Police Jonas Lie, both of whom were conveniently dead. He further maintained that he had only learned about mistreatment of Jews in death camps from evidence produced during his trial, including testimony from survivors, and that he had never previously been aware that the Germans had used gas chambers to kill inmates (*Straffesak mot Vidkun Abraham Lauritz Jonsson Quisling* 1946, 160–1, 204–5). He studiously sought to avoid any blame for having contributed to the “Final Solution.”

Quisling’s display of obfuscation, caution, and reticence was because the accusation of complicity in the murder of the deported Jews numbered among the many specific charges that he faced in court. At the trial’s end when it weighed this count, the tribunal rejected his claim, concluding that Quisling had favored persecution of the Jews and that he had been aware that they would be deported. Furthermore, said the court, he had not done anything to hinder their transport to Germany.

It should be noted, however, that the trial occurred less than 6 months after the end of the war, which meant that the panel¹⁸ did not have access to complete documentation about the extent of Quisling’s collaboration, a large amount of which did not become available until later. When making its decision about Quisling’s degree of involvement in the fate of the Jews, the tribunal was divided on the question of punishment. A majority felt that the defendant, when he took part in actions that led to the arrest and deportation of the Jews, did not fully comprehend that they were in danger of being killed. The court therefore found him guilty of manslaughter on this count. A minority of two, including the presiding judge, concluded that Quisling,

18. The nine-member tribunal that sat in judgment of Quisling consisted of four professional judges and five laymen.

due to information that he possessed about mistreatment of Jews in Germany, must have been aware that when the Norwegian Jews were deported, they were being sent to their death. These two tribunal members favored the death penalty (*Straffesak mot Vidkun Abraham Lauritz Jonssøn Quisling* 1946, 377).¹⁹

The court did reject unanimously Quisling's argument that he had no knowledge about the deportations until after they had occurred, with the chief judge having earlier commented in court that just about everyone in Oslo knew about the *Donau* transport when it took place (*Straffesak mot Vidkun Abraham Lauritz Jonssøn Quisling* 1946, 160). Information about not only the deportation but that the victims had been maltreated on the pier in Oslo harbor while being herded on board the ship, also spread quickly from Norway to neighboring Sweden. Blows, kicks, and curses accompanied the Jews as they were forced up the gangplank (Mendelsohn 1986, 124–5; Johansen 1995, 203).

* * *

As the verdict of manslaughter revealed, however, evidence that Quisling knew at the time of the deportations that the Jews would be killed was circumstantial. No documentation existed that provided definitive proof. This has since remained true, and his apologists have consistently argued that he had no prior information about the fate of the Jews.²⁰ Acceptance of his denials at face value, however, cannot be sustained

19. Quisling received the death sentence for other crimes. These included treason under the military code of justice and the civilian code, as amended by provisional decrees issued by the exile government in London. He also was found guilty of responsibility for the execution of a number of persons during the war.

20. A relatively recent example was provided by Finn Thrana, who served as *regjeringssekretær* (government secretary) in Quisling's administration, 1942–1944. He maintained that Quisling in no way was involved in the deportations. Furthermore, Thrana insisted that there was nothing that Quisling could have done to oppose actions against the Jews once he learned of them. Nor, said Thrana, did Quisling know that extermination awaited the Jews once they were shipped from Norway (Thrana 2001, 154–6). Not all of Quisling's former followers, however, believed that Quisling could not have done anything to oppose the arrest and deportation of the Jews. His personal adjutant during the war, Per Jahr, while usually fully supportive of Quisling's actions, nevertheless made an exception by strongly criticizing his failure to protest the deportation of the Jews, going so far as to declare that Quisling should have delivered an ultimatum to the Germans: “Når han fikk rede på at jødene ble deportert til Tyskland, da burde han uansett etter min mening ha satt ned foten og sagt: dette vil jeg ikke lenger” (Jahr 2002, Quisling documentary, Part 2) [When he (Quisling) found out that the Jews were being deported to Germany, then he should in my opinion, no matter what, have put his foot down and said: I will no longer accept this].

when confronted with more detailed information that has later become available about the historical situation in which the deportations took place. With Quisling's background in military intelligence gathering, and because of his inquisitive nature, it was natural for him to ferret out as much information as possible.²¹ Furthermore, as Minister President, it was clearly in his interest—in order to deal with political intrigues against him, which were not infrequent—to have full understanding of all major developments that could affect his position. He had access to a large number of sources, both German and Norwegian. These included not only personal contacts with German officials and military officers in Norway and Germany, but also intelligence gleaned from Norwegian SS members serving in German units on the Eastern Front, as well as from the State Police, from NS officials and members who traveled to Germany, and from NS representatives in Germany (Bruland 2004). One of Quisling's close associates, Police Minister Jonas Lie, who also headed *Norges SS* (the Norwegian SS),²² had personally gone on a "study tour" in the Fall of 1941 to see how the German police were handling the deportation of Jews from Germany to occupied territories in the east. The trip took Lie from Berlin to Ukraine, during which he was attached to SS units and personally witnessed mass executions of Jews (Roughthvedt 2010, 222–38).

Quisling himself had opportunity to gain information personally as a result of his wartime travels, which were frequent. He visited Berlin in February 1942 in honor of his appointment as Minister President. This occurred just shortly after the Wannsee Conference in January. It seems highly improbable that Quisling, in extensive private conversations with prominent Nazi leaders such as Rosenberg (Dahl 1992, 289; Høidal 2002, 423), did not receive at least some inside information about the German decision to implement "the Final Solution," the total annihilation of Jews.²³

21. Quisling served as an officer on the Norwegian General Staff in the years 1911–1918, and gathered military intelligence as a member of the Norwegian legation in Helsinki from 1919–1921. From 1921 onward, he again briefly rejoined the General Staff on several occasions. His military career formally came to an end in 1923.

22. *Norges SS* was renamed *Germaniske SS Norge* (Germanic SS Norway) in the Summer of 1942.

23. Hitler appointed Rosenberg Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories shortly after the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Rosenberg's ministry was represented by his immediate subordinates at the Wannsee Conference. His position gave him direct knowledge of genocidal atrocities against Jews in the east.

Later in the same year in May, Quisling made a trip along the entire Eastern Front from the Black Sea to the Gulf of Finland in order to inspect some of the Norwegian volunteers, known as *frontkjempere* (front fighters), who had been recruited by NS into units of the Waffen SS (“Føreren har besøkt fronten”²⁴ 1942). His journey included stops in Poland and Ukraine (Dahl 1992, 381), parts of Europe where the mass murders of Jews had been taking place ever since they first came under German occupation, in 1939 and 1941, respectively.

The Norwegian troops that he inspected in Ukraine served in SS-Division Wiking (SS Division Viking), a formation that had been part of Operation Barbarossa, Hitler’s military onslaught against the Soviet Union in June 1941. Approximately 1,000 Norwegian volunteers were members of Wiking in the Fall of 1941 (Emberland and Roughthvedt 2004, 371). The division was especially notorious for leaving behind a trail of death and destruction as it advanced through Ukraine, conducting atrocities that included mass killings of Jews at the front, while special SS *Einsatzgruppen* (deployment groups) specialized in similar operations against Jewish villagers behind the lines (Emberland and Kott 2012, 238–47; Hetland 2012, 21–3; Westlie 2008, 82–5). It is documented that Norwegians took part in the division’s effort to track down and execute Jews. While some may have sought to avoid taking part in killings, the majority of front fighters in Wiking most likely obeyed orders (Emberland and Roughthvedt 2004, 371). Although public awareness that Norwegian *frontkjempere* not only had observed but also participated in massacres of Jews during World War II did not become common knowledge in Norway until recently,²⁵ research has shown that some *frontkjempere*, after completing their service, shared their knowledge about German atrocities during the war with acquaintances within NS circles (Hetland 2012, 21–3).

In conformity with strict rules of censorship, however, no direct mention of the killing or mistreatment of Jews appeared in the NS-controlled media during the occupation. On the contrary, upon his return to Oslo, Quisling informed the press that the Jews he had observed on his journey were not being treated brutally. They had to wear clothing that was clearly marked to identify them as Jews and

24. Many thanks to Ivar Kraglund of *Norges Hjemmefrontmuseum* (The Norwegian Resistance Museum) for providing a copy of this article.

25. See note 27.

they were required to work, but beyond this, said Quisling, they did not experience any difficulties (Dahl 1992, 381).

* * *

One of Quisling's biographers, Hans Fredrik Dahl, consequently concluded that the Minister President, in 1942 and later, accepted German assurances at face value that the Jewish "problem" in the east was in the process of being solved by the establishment of special ghettos in which the Jews could live by themselves (Dahl 1992, 381–2).²⁶ Moreover, while acknowledging that there were no direct sources to support his further interpretation, Dahl maintained that Quisling had not favored or condoned the arrest and deportation of the Jews, about which he allegedly had deliberately been kept in the dark. Dahl asserted additionally that Quisling believed as late as 1943–1944 that the deportees were still alive in reservations and camps in Poland (Dahl 1992, 383–5).

More recently, however, a number of Norwegian researchers, several of whom are affiliated with the *Senter for studier av Holocaust og livssynsminoriteter* (Center for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities)²⁷ in Oslo have reached conclusions that are in variance with Dahl's view that Quisling was unacquainted with what would happen to the Norwegian Jews prior to and after their deportation, and that he opposed the manner in which they were treated. Instead,

26. Dahl's most recent study of Quisling (see Dahl 2004) was published in one volume. It is an abridgement and revision of his considerably larger two-volume biography (see Dahl 1991; 1992). Dahl's perspective in the shortened version concerning Quisling's role in the arrest and deportation of Jews in Norway during the occupation does not differ from that contained in the earlier 1992 volume. Since the latter provides considerably more detail and insight, it has been deemed preferable to the abridged edition for reference use in this article.

27. Generally referred to as *HL-Senteret* or, more informally, as *holocaustsenteret*, the Center is located in Quisling's former residence—a large ostentatious mansion overlooking the Oslo Fjord—which he occupied during most of the war. Under its first director, Odd-Bjørn Fure, its researchers, in particular from 2004 onward, were engaged in a series of public debates concerning the degree of Norwegian Waffen SS members' participation in atrocities (see Fure's preface to Emberland and Kott 2012, 9–12). The question of Norwegian complicity was quite novel at the time and aroused considerable discussion. This was further stimulated by Bjørn Westlie's biographical account of his father's experience as a *frontkjemper* with SS-Division Wiking, *Fars krig* (Father's War), which created a stir when it was published. Westlie's book received the prestigious *Brageprisen* (the Brage Prize) as the best nonfiction book in Norway for 2008. No mention of *frontkjemper* involvement in anti-Jewish atrocities had appeared earlier in *Norsk krigsleksikon 1940–45* (Norwegian War Encyclopedia 1940–45), published in 1995 (see Dahl et al. 1995).

more current investigations have shown that Quisling most likely had recognized during his visit to Ukraine that the Jewish laborers he observed would soon fall victim to genocide (Emberland and Kott 2012, 365; Hetland 2012, 19). These Jews were systematically being worked to death—in accordance with the Wannsee Conference’s overall plan of extermination—through hard labor that included primitive living conditions, limited rations, and brutal mistreatment (Emberland and Kott 2012, 364–5; Roughthvedt 2010, 242). Terje Emberland and Matthew Kott, in their detailed examination of SS influence in Norway during the occupation, have therefore concluded that it is difficult to believe that Quisling, as a result of what he had seen and experienced during his journey in May 1942, could have failed to realize what the fate of Norwegian Jews would be when they later faced deportation (Emberland and Kott 2012, 365).

Another HL-Senter researcher, Christopher S. Harper, has strongly challenged Dahl’s suggestion that Quisling personally did not approve of the deportations. Harper maintains that if Quisling had truly felt concern about the treatment of Jewish deportees, then he had ample opportunity, even after the *Donau* had left, to voice any reservations that he might have had before the remainder of the imprisoned Jews were sent to Stettin on the *Gotenland* in February 1943 (Harper 2012, 12). Harper’s contention has indeed been supported, if indirectly, by Dahl, when he indicated that Quisling had already, in early December 1942 (before the *Gotenland*’s departure), cracked down on expressions of disapproval within NS to the deportation of the Jews in two strongly anti-Semitic speeches in Trondheim in which he defended Jewish expulsion (Dahl 1992, 379–80).²⁸

Harper also raises the point that Quisling did not make any inquiries about the Jews after they were deported. Such a reaction should have been natural for him to make if they had still been alive (Harper 2012, 14–5). But neither Quisling nor other high NS officials ever asked about

28. This denunciation of the Jews presented difficulties for Quisling during his trial. He was asked to account for why he had, in Trondheim, defended the persecution and deportation of the Jews. As usual when faced with damaging evidence in court, he dissembled. He insisted he did not remember having made negative comments against the Jews, but that he instead had merely presented “et alminnelig foredrag” (*Straffesak mot Vidkun Abraham Lauritz Jonsson Quisling* 1946, 159) [an ordinary speech]. Dahl maintains that Quisling outwardly was compelled to voice support for the Germans due to his position (Dahl 1992, 380–1), the inference being that Quisling’s support for deportation did not reveal his true feelings.

their well-being.²⁹ Their fate was fully known among party leaders. Two of Quisling's immediate subordinates, Justice Minister Sverre Riisnæs (who had accompanied Quisling on his frontline travels earlier in the year) and Police Minister Jonas Lie, both looked forward with anticipation in the Fall of 1942 to the arrest and deportation of the Jews. Riisnæs did so as acting head of the police because Lie at the time was serving on the front line outside of beleaguered Leningrad. Riisnæs thereby was nominally in charge of the arrest of the Jews on November 26. The only complaint that he later expressed in his correspondence with Lie was that the deportation had not gone as smoothly as he and Lie had originally anticipated (Roughthvedt 2010, 246; Emberland and Kott 2012, 359–60).

The recent findings referred to above plus the results of other research cited previously in this article show that a preponderance of evidence supports the conclusion that Quisling cooperated willingly in the implementation of the deportation of the Norwegian Jews while having prior knowledge of the fate that awaited them. The argument that specific documentary evidence is required to prove his share of responsibility for the deaths of Norwegian Jews is specious. Very little history would be written if historians were always obligated to provide full primary evidence (written or oral) for every interpretation and conclusion that they make. For example, no document exists to show that Hitler ordered the total annihilation of European Jews.³⁰ Yet no competent historian will deny that Hitler bore full culpability for the murder of 6 million Jews, due to the overwhelming amount of indirect evidence that has been accumulated concerning Hitler's blame. The same applies to Quisling. To maintain the opposite would be to start down the slippery slope toward Holocaust denial.

* * *

The outcome of the arrests and deportations during late 1942–early 1943 was that approximately 35 percent of Norway's Jewish population perished.³¹ As noted, Denmark in comparison suffered a much smaller

29. This stands in marked contrast with inquiries that leading NS members made about the well-being of other categories of Norwegians who had been sent to concentration camps in Germany by the SS (see Dahl 1992, 383).

30. See Kershaw (2000) for how Hitler during the war always avoided being linked directly with atrocities against Jews, a practice that Quisling also followed.

31. While the exact number of Jews in Norway during the war has not been clearly established, with estimates ranging from approximately 1,760 to 2,200, a total of approximately 2,100, based on Bjarte Bruland's research, has generally come to be accepted (Bruland 2008, 7).

loss, despite having a larger Jewish population totaling approximately 7,900. Several factors explain the differences between the two nations, whose political and cultural values were very similar: (1) A significant number of Norwegian Jews were dispersed throughout the country,³² making them easier to arrest than Denmark's Jews, who overwhelmingly lived on the island of *Sjælland* (Zealand) from which they could quickly be transported across *Øresund* (the Sound) to safety in Sweden; (2) The Norwegian arrests occurred almost a year earlier than in Denmark. By the Fall of 1943, knowledge of what awaited Danish Jews had become widely known, motivating their desire to escape to Sweden, whereas in the Fall of 1942, the Norwegian Jews had not yet learned the ultimate purpose of the arrests (Eitinger 1945, 159); (3) Although the Jews in both countries sought refuge in Sweden, the large majority of those fleeing from Denmark had a short voyage by sea. In Norway many refugees experienced a physically demanding trek—through difficult terrain that often was hilly or mountainous; forested; and covered with rivers, lakes, or marshes—before reaching the border.³³ Older Jews frequently feared such a strenuous undertaking, which explains why the age group 50–60 had the highest percentage of deaths due to deportation (Mendelsohn 1986, 260).

The single most important factor, however, was the stance taken by the government and its administrators in the two countries. As shown, Danish authorities refused to implement anti-Jewish measures, with German demands being rejected. Furthermore, a number of German officials and military commanders in Denmark deliberately impaired the arrest effort (Pundik 1993, 102ff). These included Werner Best, Hitler's special plenipotentiary in Denmark, who assiduously worked to sabotage the arrest of Danish Jews (Bak 2009, 4).³⁴ In Norway, the opposite occurred. Terboven was committed to taking action against the Jews, and the Germans experienced no obstruction from the NS regime. On the contrary, Quisling and his officials consistently collaborated in imposing anti-Jewish sanctions, culminating with the arrests and deportations.

32. As noted, only 55 percent lived in the Oslo area.

33. For more detailed discussion of these factors, see Hoidal (1997, 169–71, 173–7).

34. Best did not wish to heighten Danish unrest and antagonism to the German occupation, which would inevitably have ensued if the SS had succeeded in capturing and deporting large numbers of Jews. While he ostensibly supported the arrest effort, in reality Best sought to remove all obstacles that prevented Jews from escaping. He thereby succeeded in helping to make Denmark “judenrein” [free of Jews], but not in the manner that Hitler had wanted.

The difference between the occupation regimes in Denmark and Norway was noteworthy. Denmark experienced the mildest occupation in Europe, without Nazi control of administration and with a limited SS presence.³⁵ Norway, on the other hand, was firmly in the grip of Terboven's Reichskommissariat, which exercised power directly through SS police authority, and with the assistance of Quisling and his officials. This difference resulted in the loss of only a small percentage of Danish Jews, while almost all Norwegian Jews who experienced deportation did not survive the war.

Fortunately, unoccupied Sweden lay across the nearest border. The majority of the Norwegian Jews, despite physical challenges, were thereby able to avoid capture, some in an improvised manner with the aid of spontaneous rescue networks that arose, or on their own initiative (Levin 2007, 7). But most of the some 1,100 Jews who gained safety were assisted by groups that in one way or another were affiliated with the resistance movement, while in a smaller number of instances, aid was provided by persons motivated mainly by pecuniary considerations (Bruland and Tangestuen 2011, 594).³⁶ In all cases, however, had it not been for Sweden's geographical proximity, there is every reason to believe that the death rate in Norway would have been considerably greater, possibly even as large or larger than those of the Netherlands and Belgium, the two countries in German-occupied Western Europe that experienced the highest percentage of Jewish deaths (Joseph Michman 1990, 1045; Dan Michman 1990, 161). Unlike Norway, Jews in these two countries did not have an adjoining state that was free of German control.

Quisling's major responsibility for the high percentage of deaths among Norwegian Jews is clear, made even more obvious by the anti-democratic leadership under which his administration and his party

35. Denmark, which did not resist the German invasion, and whose territory was not as strategic militarily as Norway's, was permitted to retain far greater freedom under a limited veneer of German control. While a collaborationist party existed, equally as anti-Semitic as NS, and Danes were recruited into the Waffen SS, Danish Nazis were not allowed to control the administration.

36. It proved possible to alert the majority of the Norwegian Jews and to organize their escape largely during a 1-month period in the Fall of 1942. The combined SS and NS endeavor to arrest all male Jews on October 26 served as a tocsin, with large numbers of Jews now recognizing the urgent need to escape. Most of them succeeded in doing so by November 26, when the all-out effort to round up and deport the entire Jewish community occurred (Fure 2016).

functioned, giving him, in theory, ultimate decision-making authority as both head of government and as NS *Fører*.

It should be noted that Norwegian historiography has at times been criticized for being too restricted, failing to take into account transnational developments that parallel Norwegian historical subject matter. Such criticism can be valid, which certainly would have been the case if this article had failed to make comparisons between Norway and other Western European countries, Denmark in particular. The contrast between the treatment of Jews in the two Scandinavian neighbors is striking, despite the close cultural and historical commonality that they shared.

* * *

In spite of conducting the most lenient European judicial process against collaborators in countries that had been under German occupation, Norwegian courts did make use of the death penalty after the war. Quisling, together with two other members of his government, was among the twenty-five Norwegians who were executed.³⁷ The remainder of those who were brought to trial, the overwhelming majority former members of NS, experienced milder treatment. Of the 46,085 found guilty, some 18,000 were imprisoned (*Om landssvikoppgjøret* 1962, 410), but frequent reduction of sentences and commutations rapidly lessened the number in jail. The last of those incarcerated, whose original death sentences had been commuted to lifetime imprisonment, were released in the Fall of 1957 (Andenæs 1980, 226–30). Officials in charge of the judicial process, in a country then numbering only slightly more than 3 million, clearly recognized the need to re-integrate former NS members back into society as quickly as possible.

This goal succeeded, as shown by the failure of attempts to establish viable neo-Nazi movements after 1945. Beginning in the 1970s, small groups of neo-Nazis did make scattered efforts to create political parties,³⁸ but these endeavors invariably ended in collapse due to internal divisions brought about by bitter quarrels and recriminations that inevitably led to dissolution.³⁹ By the beginning of the twenty-first century

37. The other twenty-two, all men, were found guilty of crimes such as murder of prisoners, torture, and serving as informants against the resistance movement, acts carried out on behalf of the State Police or the Gestapo.

38. Not all of these groups regarded Quisling favorably.

39. See Fangen (2001) for detailed analysis of Norwegian neo-Nazism since the 1970s.

such limited neo-Nazi activity, which at any one time only involved a maximum of a few hundred individuals, had ended in Norway.

Quisling consequently left behind no lasting legacy following his execution. His NS movement, which even at the height of the occupation had included only a small minority of Norwegians,⁴⁰ could only be sustained by German backing. After Allied victory in Europe, his options were therefore limited to flight (Franco Spain, Argentina), suicide, or surrender in the hope of lenient treatment. Unrealistic to the end, he chose the latter.

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40. It is estimated that a total of approximately 50,000 persons belonged to NS during the course of the occupation. However, because of resignations, the party never numbered more than about 43,000 at any one time (*Om landssvikoppgjøret* 1962, 109).

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